

Each year Hunter Education instructors, like Clyde Grosz of Hazen, volunteer time to help with the Game and Fish Department's Pathway to Hunting event at the State Fair.

Giving Something Back By Patricia Stockdill

John Gorman credits his two great-uncles for teaching him the finer points of life.

Growing up in southern Indiana, Gorman tagged along on countless fishing and hunting trips. He learned how to sit still for squirrels, the right plastic worm presentation for largemouth bass and the proper set to entice a raccoon. He held the two semi-retired gentlemen in awe, even though he and Uncle Glenn managed to occasionally get into trouble with Aunt Helen for their adventures.

Those childhood excursions shaped Gorman's love for hunting and the outdoors. "We in the United States have a very unique hunting and fishing heritage; one that allows every person the opportunity to participate in hunting and fishing and to harvest their own game," said Gorman, who now lives in Larimore.

Gorman has traveled all over the world while serving in the military. It provided opportunities to hunt in places such as Europe, so he recognizes the differences in hunting and outdoor heritage and attitudes.

He jumped at the opportunity to become a certified North Dakota Hunter Education instructor at the Grand Forks Air Force Base four years ago. "I felt a strong desire to give something back to the sport of hunting; a sport I've enjoyed immensely for nearly 50 years," Gorman said.

The desire to give something back is a common thread woven through many volunteers who lend their talents to North Dakota Game and Fish Department education programs. It does not stop with Hunter Education, even though that program has the highest number of volunteer instructors and is the longest tenured Game and Fish volunteer program.

The desire to give something back threads its way through many volunteer instructors involved with nine different Game and Fish conservation education projects: Birds of North Dakota, Boat and Water Safety, Conservation Volunteers, Hunter Education, Hooked on Fishing, Outdoor Wildlife Learning Sites, Project WILD and Aquatics, Fur Harvester Education and Wildlife of North Dakota.

In addition, the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program uses volunteer instructor expertise. Many BOW instructors volunteer with other Game and Fish programs, said Nancy Boldt, Department boat and water safety coordinator, who heads BOW for the Department.

The Department would not have anywhere near the number of participants in education programs without assistance from its hundreds of volunteers, said Dave Jensen, Department education coordinator. Many instructors volunteer for more than one program.

Reasons for serving as volunteer instructors are almost as diverse and numerous as the instructors themselves. Yes, many share the desire to give something back. Others, such as Mandan's Jerry Roth, have a deep

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concern about the limited knowledge today's youth have regarding natural resources and what that spells for the future.

Roth has been involved in education for 44 years. Now retired, he's been active in Project WILD and Aquatics for 17 years. "I see fewer young people out hunting and that's where you learn about nature," he said. "I see fewer young people out fishing."

Being outdoors was natural for Roth as a child growing up in rural North Dakota near Lake Tschida, a reservoir on the Heart River in Grant County, about 50 miles southwest of Mandan. Like Gorman, those experiences instilled a love for wildlife at a young age.

But the world is different for many of today's children. For some, there is no connection to what's wild. Many are not getting outside to explore and experience outdoors and nature, Roth said, even if it means visiting a local zoo.

Department conservation and education projects such as WILD/Aquatics, Birds of North Dakota and Wildlife of North Dakota bring the outdoors and natural experience to children. Most kids are in awe when they see

and feel a fox pelt or snapping turtle shell pulled from a Wildlife of North Dakota wildlife trunk. Often, students don't grasp the connection between a pelt and an actual animal, Roth said.

Kids need to be exposed to outdoor experiences and nature at a young age, Roth said, or they are unlikely to participate when older.

Bismarck's Joe Neuenschwander shares similar concerns. A member of the nonprofit youth fishing education organization Lure 'em for Life, Neuenschwander has helped with Hooked on Fishing for eight years, including youth fishing camps at Lake Sakakawea and Devils Lake. He enjoys sharing his love of fishing with others, especially seeing the enjoyment children experience when fishing or learning about fishing. He also knows that if he or any other volunteer instructor can get a child hooked on fishing, they are less apt to get into trouble.

Plus, they are learning an activity that can last a lifetime. "It's a love of your fellow human beings — in this case it's kids," Neuenschwander said.

Like many volunteers, Butte's Rick Tischaefer is looking to the future. Tischaefer is borrowing from his experience in helping Wisconsin trappers develop a fur harvester education program, to assist in North Dakota's upcoming Fur Harvester Education program.

The North Dakota Fur Hunters and Trappers Association approached the Department about developing a cooperative program in 2003. The results can be seen later this year when volunteer Fur Harvester instructors become certified and the first classes are available in the state.

North Dakota's program may have borrowed from Wisconsin, but Tischaefer said this is a model program for other states to follow because it's broader than trapping, including predator calling, hunting and snaring.

The future of trapping is bleak unless the public and fur harvesters alike are better educated, Tischaefer said. "There isn't going to be a future for snaring, calling, trapping, unless we do something about it now," he said.

That means promoting the role of fur harvesters in wildlife management and demonstrating techniques. Fur harvester education is the first step, Tischaefer said, and as harvesters do a better job and are more knowledgeable, public acceptance will improve as well.

Terri Greenwood has taught boat and water safety and canoeing at Lake Metigoshe State Park for five summers. A Westhope educator, Greenwood said it is important that people of all ages feel comfortable in the water and in boats. It is even more important that they know what to do in the event something happens, to avoid a panic situation, she said.

Greenwood enjoys people. Like other volunteer instructors, she enjoys sharing her knowledge of something that provides her with such pleasure. The activities also get people outside, she said, and into nature. "It's a good way to get the basics, get back to earth and in touch with themselves," she said.

The motives vary. The people vary. But North Dakota's volunteer conservation education instructors share so much – the enjoyment derived from their particular activity, desire to teach and share with others and ability to give of themselves. People of all ages in North Dakota have so much to gain from their contributions.

PATRICIA STOCKDILL, Garrison, is a freelance outdoor writer.



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Nick Simonson, Valley City, volunteers his time to help kids learn more about fishing.

SPAWNING INTEREST, TEACHING HABITAT

The aim of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's wildlife conservation education projects is to inspire interest in the outdoors, while promoting safe, ethical behavior in hunting, fishing, trapping, wildlife viewing and other activities relating to wildlife.

Just as important is the effort to make the connection between wildlife species and the habitats upon which they depend for survival. "For example, teaching about bird identification is beneficial in itself," said Chris Grondahl, Department outreach supervisor, "but if we can teach bird identification, while focusing on the habitats critical to birds, the students – and animals in the end – get more out of it."

THE PROGRAMS

The average Hunter Education instructor has about 14 years of experience, said Jim Carter, Game and Fish Department Hunter Education supervisor.

The North Dakota Legislature required mandatory Hunter Education in 1979 after it was first made available in 1972 as a voluntary course. Anyone born after December 31, 1961 must have Hunter Education certification in order to hunt in the state.

The legislature followed with mandatory basic boating safety in 1982. The legislation required that anyone 12-15 years of age needed a safe boating course if operating a boat powered by a 10 horsepower or bigger motor unless accompanied by an adult.

The course is available through home study, said Nancy Boldt, Department boat and water safety coordinator. In addition, volunteer instructors in several communities across the state conduct classroom sessions. More than 30 volunteers teach a variety of Boat and Water Safety courses, she said, and in 2004, 55 classes were taught, reaching more than 3,000 youth and adults.

Hooked on Fishing began in 1987 after the Federal Sportfish Restoration Act provided that up to 10 percent of fisheries funding from the program could be used for aquatic education, said Dave Jensen, Department education coordinator. In 2004, 200 volunteers conducted more than 300 events for more than 20,000 kids and adults.

Since then, other conservation education programs have blossomed at the Game and Fish Department, including the soon-to-be-launched Fur Harvester Education program. Other new programs include Birds of North Dakota and Wildlife of North Dakota. Outdoor Wildlife Learning Sites have been around several years, but it's only recently that volunteers have been solicited to help conduct activities at sites across the state. In addition, people can simply contribute their time as conservation volunteers to assist with a variety of on-the-ground projects, such as tree planting.

A look at the programs:

- Birds of North Dakota Bird identification and their habitats.
- **Boat and Water Safety** Rules and regulations for safe watercraft operation and instruction of the mandatory youth program.
- **Conservation volunteers** Assist with a variety of habitat and conservation projects, such as tree planting, fish stocking, data entry or boat ramp construction.
- Fur Harvester Education Basic fur hunting and trapping education and furthering knowledge of the state's furbearers.
- **Hunter Education** Improve hunter ethics, personal safety skills, promote improved landowner-hunter relations, increase knowledge of laws and regulations and basic firearm and archery safety training.
- **Hooked on Fishing** Fishing basics, including bait and tackle, fish biology, water quality, aquatic habitats and North Dakota fish species.
- Outdoor Wildlife Learning Sites Use OWLS to provide youth education.
- **Project WILD and Aquatics** A kindergarten through grade 12 program for educators to heighten wildlife and conservation awareness.
- Wildlife of North Dakota Information about various North Dakota wildlife species and their habitats.

About 700 volunteers serve as Hunter Education instructors, the largest volunteer program. About 50 of those are women. Several hundred others volunteer for other programs, with nearly 200 active conservation instructors. While that number seems large, Boldt, Carter and Jensen agree that additional instructors are always welcome – and needed.

The most stringent course requirements are for legislatively-mandated hunter education and basic boat safety programs. But other programs provide a wide range of flexibility, allowing instructors to maximize their personal expertise and talents.

The programs are also community-based, Jensen said, and they can be as extensive as the need and interest dictates. They can also be taught in conjunction with other programs and events, such as a boating safety or basic fishing program before a youth fishing event. Programs can be taught throughout the year.

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WHAT IT TAKES

Backgrounds of hundreds of conservation education volunteers run the gamut, said Chris Grondahl, Game and Fish Department outreach coordinator. They include men and women, professionals, trade workers, educators, farmers, and college students, and they vary in age from students to retirees.

Grondahl described conservation education program volunteers as "high quality" because they all must possess background knowledge in their chosen program, in addition to contributing time and effort to become a volunteer, as well as conduct programs.

But instructors do not need to be expert educators.

Hunter Education instructors need a positive attitude and possess a keen desire to learn, said John Gorman, an instructor from Larimore . "Many years of hunting experience are not necessary. Interestingly, hunting attitude and the right ethics seem a better fit than years and years of hunting experience," he said.

The requirements are simple, Grondahl said: be outgoing and enthusiastic, have a smile on your face and be willing to share your knowledge in your chosen program. Toss in a willingness to get involved, desire to work with others and the ability to work with children, and a person is on their way to the making of a volunteer, said Marty Egeland, Department outreach biologist, Grand Forks.

Well, there is more to it than that. All volunteer instructors must pass a background check and be at least 18 years of age.

In addition, other requirements vary with the program:

- Birds of North Dakota Instructors must attend a program training session, be a knowledgeable birder and conduct at least two Birds of North Dakota activities each year.
- Boat and Water Safety Conduct at least one Boating Basic, ice safety or water safety course each year and provide proof of

completion of a National Association of State Boating Law Administrators-approved course.

- Fur Harvester Education Conduct at least one Fur Harvester Education event each year.
- Hunter Education Completed Hunter Education, take an instructor certification quiz and oral interview, assist a certified instructor with one full course, attend in-service workshops and teach a full course every two years.
- Hooked on Fishing Participate in Hooked on Fishing training sessions or assist a certified instructor and complete at least one Hooked on Fishing activity each year.
- Outdoor Wildlife Learning Site Have access to an OWLS site and complete one OWLS activity each year.
- Project WILD and Aquatics Participate in an instructor workshop or assist with a full training session and complete one Project WILD and Aquatics activity each year.
- Wildlife of North Dakota Participate in a Wildlife of North Dakota workshop and complete two Wildlife of North Dakota activities each year.

Instructors are asked to complete a reporting form after each event to assist the Game and Fish Department in tracking volunteer hours, providing recognition and obtaining grant funding for the programs.

The Game and Fish Department supplies teaching aids and training handbooks for each program.

Gorman would like to see more women and younger adults become Hunter Education instructors. "The future of hunting rests on those who follow and we need them, especially women," he said.

Rick Tischaefer, Butte, volunteers his time to teach a predator calling class at Becoming an Outdoors-Woman in 2003.

Getting Involved

Contact the following North Dakota Game and Fish Department staff for information about becoming a conservation volunteer:

- Boat and Water Safety Nancy Boldt, 328-6312; email nboldt@state.nd.us.
- Hooked on Fishing Dave Jensen, 328-6322; email djensen@state.nd.us.
- Hunter Education Jim Carter, 328-6316; email jcarter@state.nd.us.
- Outreach section supervisor Chris Grondahl, 328-6612; email cgrondahl@state.nd.us.

Outreach biologists in four North Dakota communities can also provide information:

- Bismarck Jeb Williams, 328-6332; email jwilliam@state.nd.us.
- Fargo Doug Leier, 277-0719; email dleier@state.nd.us.
- Grand Forks Marty Egeland, 795-3811; email megeland@state.nd.us.
- Minot Greg Gullickson, 857-7748; email ggullick@state.nd.us.



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